



## MEETING HIGHLIGHTS:

# Traffic Safety Culture and the Media

Wednesday, July 11, 2020

1:00 PM – 2:30 PM

Presented via Zoom

All presentations and related meeting handouts are located on the RSTF Website:

[www.dvrpc.org/Committees/RSTF](http://www.dvrpc.org/Committees/RSTF)

### Welcoming Remarks

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 PM by Kelley Yemen, City of Philadelphia. Ms. Yemen discussed the postponement of the meeting (originally scheduled for June 3) as we grappled with the nationwide protests in support of Black Lives Matter. An opportunity to provide feedback on how the RSTF should consider the impact of the BLM movement on traffic safety was provided through the meeting survey. Following Ms. Yemen's remarks, Marco Gorini, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), led the group in a moment of silence for a recent victim of traffic violence in the region.

### Introduction to Traffic Safety Culture – Presentation

One keynote speaker and three panelists addressed the meeting on traffic safety culture and the media. Prior to the speakers, Kevin Murphy, DVRPC, introduced the topic. Mr. Murphy presented first on the Regional Safety Task Force and on overall crash trends, including regional crash data for 2014 to 2018. Fatalities and severe injuries (KSI) from crashes reached an eight-year high in the region in 2018, up slightly from 2017. Mr. Murphy also commented on early data from the pandemic-related stay-at-home orders that show consistent crash severity trends despite significant reductions in traffic volumes, which practitioners say is due to excessive speeds in the absence of congestion; it will be months before definitive data is available. Mr. Murphy then discussed the program for RSTF 2020: Focus on Traffic Safety Culture and provided an overview of the first meeting in the series, Introduction to Traffic Safety Culture. Erin Curry, DVRPC, described how the RSTF develops volunteer action items and the proposed traffic safety toolkit for journalists action item that DVRPC will organize. Following the action item discussion, Mr. Murphy introduced the keynote speaker: Kelcie Ralph, Rutgers University.

Ms. Ralph presented Let's Improve Crash Coverage and Save Lives. Ms. Ralph presented research that reviewed editorial patterns in 200 local news articles on crashes involving people walking and biking. She also presented research on the effect on perceptions of blame and preferred solutions in 999 participants reading slightly different news stories about crashes. She identified two key issues with news coverage today: (1) it tends to shift blame toward pedestrians, and (2) it frames crashes as isolated incidents. Blame shifting occurs through grammar choices like focusing on the pedestrian as the subject of the sentence and using non-agentive or object-based language that obscures the role of a human actor driving the car. Including thematic framing, which identifies connections between crash events rather than presenting them as isolated incidents, increases readers' likelihood to identify other factors as at fault in causing a crash (like roadway design), building support for systems-level solutions.

## Keynote Q & A

Shelley Scalzo Brown: Do you have examples of well-written articles that meet this criteria?

Ms. Ralph: Here is the study about perceptions of safety measures from Washington DC that I mentioned: Cicchino, J.B., Wells, J.K., McCart, A.T., 2014. Survey about pedestrian safety and attitudes toward automated traffic enforcement in Washington, D.C. *Traffic Injury Prevention* 15 (4), 414–423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15389588.2013.830212>.

Michael Clemmons: Print journalism circulation is in a downward trend and therefore less influential. Are there more proactive things we can do to change the culture?

Ma. Ralph: Twitter! Communicating with journalists.

John Saylor: I am curious if there are any studies on coverage of traffic safety issues other than crashes? Like prioritizing the voices of commuters/drivers in coverage of automated enforcement programs, traffic calming devices, etc.

Ms. Ralph: Studies show those who walk or bike are more likely to support automated enforcement; drivers tend to think this is not as needed. It's all about perspective.

### **Traffic Safety Culture and the Media – Panel Discussion**

Mr. Murphy introduced Elise Turner, DVRPC. Ms. Turner served as the moderator for the panel discussion. Ms. Turner introduced the three panelists: Matthew Skoufalos, NJ PEN, Patricia Madej, Philadelphia Inquirer, and Captain Mark Otherwise, Philadelphia Police Department.

Captain Otherwise described his roles in the Philadelphia Police Department. He first began his career as a regular police officer with traffic enforcement, and later was assigned to the Accident Investigation Division.

Ms. Madej described her role as a Transportation Reporter for the Philadelphia inquirer. Her role is to report on crashes in the city and write more in-depth stories and contextualizing traffic safety measures and crashes as they happen.

Mr. Skoufalos described NJ PEN's coverage of transportation in southern New Jersey. NJ PEN writes about multimodal transportation, including trains, bicyclists, and drivers. Mr. Skoufalos emphasized that multimodality is a big strategy of revitalization.

Captain Otherwise explained the process of how crashes are reported to the police department. The information comes initially from a patrol car or unit. Police officers are trained not to identify subjects in a crash to the public until they are charged and families are notified. Captain Otherwise noted that there is a problem with social media in familial notification, as sometimes a victim's name is released before the family could be notified. The Accident Investigation Division then provides information to journalists and TV media.

Ms. Madej described initial crash reporting as almost always very brief, a breaking news alert with preliminary data. These stories are meant to be reported quickly with basic crash details and who was involved that may or may not be turned into a larger story.

Mr. Skoufalos said that reporting crash stories is dependent on the relationships the local police departments have with the media. Most stories rely on the official word of what is released to the public from police chiefs or public relations officers unless writers are on the scene and can speak with an eyewitness. Follow-up stories are important to identify the victim in print, identify any charges, and contextualize crash events in the larger scale of traffic incidents in the area.

Ms. Madej explained that she relies heavily on the police reports and the language within them. She noted that weekend reporting was the most challenging, as PR officers can be hard to reach during those times. Ms. Madej also uses previous stories, Philadelphia's Vision Zero plan, and corridor safety measures that are either planned or in place to contextualize these reports further. Ms. Madej stressed that journalists have to wait for the police to confirm names, and that journalists must be very careful to get details right.

Mr. Skoufalos relies on multiple sources of information when gathering data for a crash story, and said that online sources have the flexibility to be updated as more information is released. He noted that the final word in an investigation could take a long time after the event has happened.

Captain Otherwise suggested that planners could help to contextualize crashes by explaining how the built environment is or may be constructed for roads for all road users. Captain Otherwise cited crosswalks as an example to assist officers recording the crash report to understand why a crash may have happened at a particular location.

Ms. Madej said that planners could educate journalists on the ways that stories could be reframed or reworked to reflect road safety culture. Ms. Madej noted that TV stations often do not have designated transportation reporters that are well versed in the topic and understand the importance of word choice. Journalists often do not come from a planning background and rely on conversations with planners and advocates for information.

Mr. Skoufalos explained that long range perspectives on planning and how it's ingrained in the community are very important and should be focused on even before something goes wrong. These projects should build an audience narrative on how they work, get around, and play.

Mr. Skoufalos also explained how media biases and charged language can be harmful in reporting. He suggested that journalists should "empty the notebook", and put all known details into a story. Mr. Skoufalos stated that he took exception to journalists "creating outrage", and said he believed that reporting should be neutral, thinking about things in less combative terms. He said he believed that if something is newsworthy, it is non-partisan. Framing of systemic issues should only be a piece of the outrage.

Ms. Madej said that the media should tell the story of what happened and carries a lot of responsibility for how things are perceived. She said that Kelcie's report recognized the best way to be as neutral as possible. Advocates play a role and how things are portrayed by journalists.

Captain Otherwise discussed linguistic choices of object versus human based language. He explained that humans tend to label people by their description, then personification, saying disabled child instead of a child with disabilities. Captain Otherwise said that if editors would put the person first before the object, it would increase empathy. Captain Otherwise also mentioned that he has invoked emotion himself with hit-and-run crashes to help catch people who fled the scene of a crash.

Ms. Ralph clarified that she didn't suggest that the goal of the media should be to drive outrage, but that in the research she saw a lack of outrage about crashes and explored whether or not media played a role.

Ms. Madej explained how she uses Vision Zero to add greater levels of context to city roads. She noted that Vision Zero has shifted some reporters' approaches to crash stories, and said it would be interesting to revisit Ms. Ralph's research in 2018.

Mr. Skoufalos discussed that Vision Zero can sometimes be thought of as an abstract concept. He said that there was more work to be done to ensure that multimodal accessibility is at the forefront of planning and development. Coverage often overlooks meetings because of short notice times, and feedback. There is a lot of work to be done if communities in southern New Jersey want to adopt it as a planning goal as best practice.

Captain Otherwise admitted that he was not very familiar with Vision Zero before he was assigned to the Accident Investigation Division. He never considered the role of the built environment while working as a regular police officer, but now it plays a very large role in crash investigations.

Captain Otherwise also said that unintended biases can appear in crash reports because patrol officers look for human behaviors when taking crash reports. They may point to human fault even if environmental factors may have caused the crash. Captain Otherwise said that it was something that should be added to police trainings in the future.

Anne Mithell, Jefferson University, asked how to best educate healthcare workers that interact closely with victims of crashes and their families and friends. Captain Otherwise suggested Families for Safer Streets Philadelphia as a great organization to refer to. Mr. Skoufalos said that building stakeholderhood in groups is the best way to get people to pay more attention to traffic safety. When people see how certain temporary changes, such as the rise in bicycling during Porchfest in southern New Jersey and road closures in Philadelphia for the Pope, they see a different way to do things that they may enjoy.

An anonymous attendee asked if journalists include all factors (helmets, clothing, etc.) in reporting and if these factors contribute to the panelists' reporting. Mr. Skoufalos said that if these details are included in police reports, they are not intended to sway blame, saying that the term "accident" implies that an incident was unintentional until intended blame is found. Mr. Skoufalos also noted that many traffic deaths in New Jersey result from people crossing Routes 70, 38 and 130 because of driver speeds. He said many towns have environmental factors and systemic factors that should be focused on more than just the individuals. An attendee responded to this statement in the Chat Box by pointing out that frequent crashes on select roadways provides an opportunity for thematic framing to raise awareness of a recurring problem, as suggested by Kelcie Ralph's research.

Joy Huertas, City of Philadelphia, asked how can the City and VZ task force better engage hyper-local media outlets to support coverage of traffic safety and overall mobility when many streets with high KSI numbers disproportionately affect low-income and minority communities in Philadelphia. Ms. Madej said that educating journalists would be effective. She explained that hyperlocal media should be highlighting more than just the most popular areas, and the City has to show what's important. Mayor Kenney talking about traffic crashes shows what is the largest priority in the city. Mr. Skoufalos added that reporters can help solve crimes. Eyewitness accounts and identifying actors can be effective in changing the outcomes of crashes.

Ms. Ralph asked Mr. Skoufalos if it was possible for reporters when reporting on crashes to include contextual information such as speed facts to supplement police reports. Mr. Skoufalos said that at NJ PEN they do this, but in larger news rooms information is carried over from those reports, not intentionally leaving out more information. He explains that police may not have had exact speed but instead report that "speed may have been a factor". Mr. Skoufalos said that bare minimum contextualization could be a Google Maps screenshot of the location. He also said that in his reporting, he tries to go back to previous stories in the same towns to contextualize events further. If more contextual information was available, Mr Skoufalos said, it would be very beneficial.

Arnold Anderson, New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition asked Captain Otherwise how much training do officers receive in collision reconstruction, and do you think a greater cooperation with bike groups, pedestrians and MPOs would help them identify systemic problems within the traffic system? Mr. Anderson says that most officers do not ride bikes, thus they will have a windshield bias. Captain Otherwise explains that officers go through four levels of training, a basic course, technical courses, and crash reconstruction. Captain Otherwise says that most officers do have a windshield bias, and a lot of experience is needed to change that perspective. He admits that he too had that same perspective before the Accident Investigation Unit. Captain Otherwise says that these trainings are good for solving crime, but says that crashes have to be approached in the same manner as crime to solve problems.

Allison Hastings, DVRPC asked Ms. Madej and Mr. Skoufalos on how they decide whether or not to write a follow-up story on a traffic incident or a planning initiative. Ms Madej said that it depends on the incident itself, and public outcry about an incident and noticing trends such as speed on Roosevelt Boulevard can warrant a follow up. Mr. Skoufalos adds that he decides to follow up if the full story hasn't been told yet. Updates, repeat incidents, news-worthy profiles of people can warrant a follow up. He says that he writes long stories, and often revisits old stories. Ms. Madej said that initial crash notifications to the inquirer are always accessible, but follow-ups can be harder to track down. Greater levels of available data would naturally lead to a follow up story. Mr. Skoufalos suggested that crash reporting could be changed to a top-down reporting of events to reduce the amount of time journalists have to spend putting pieces together, but acknowledges that this could be too much burden on the current system, though it would make a difference in how crashes are perceived by the public.

### **Additional Q&A (not live answered)**

Laura Fredricks, Families for Safe Streets PHL, Emily Fredricks Foundation: Please have that info about the two pagers again.

Ms. Ralph: <https://transfersmagazine.org/magazine-article/opinion-to-save-lives-lets-cover-crashes-better/>

Emily Kennedy, OTIS: I think sometimes the default is to sympathize with drivers when we discuss crashes because the reality is, the majority of people in the U.S. drive. What do you believe are good strategies for people to better empathize with cyclists and pedestrians?

Ms. Ralph: That is such a good question Emily! I think experience is probably the best way to foster empathy. For example, I would recommend including decision makers on walk and bike audits.

John Saylor, DVRPC: Bringing street and systems design problems into traffic safety coverage makes a lot of sense - should this also extend to \*vehicle\* design problems as well (like the strong link between SUV/Crossovers and higher pedestrian and driver fatality rates)?

Ms. Ralph: John, yes! It would be excellent to include the features of the vehicle (SUV or other design features). Each article could include the stat that even if you are hit at the same speed, you are MUCH more likely to die when hit by an SUV.

Matthew Edmond, Montgomery County Planning Commission: There's a small but vocal anti-Vision Zero community in the region. How would you respond to a skeptic/critic who believes today's topic is merely an effort to blame or bully drivers by anti-car urbanists?

Ms. Ralph: I think that the Vision Zero concept is a worthy strategy. You won't reach the sky if you do not aim for it.

Mr. Saylor: In other words - should we be making the same "thematic links" Kelcie described, but for design issues, in the context of an SUV-on-car or SUV-on-pedestrian crashes?

Ms. Ralph: Yes! People do not understand just how dangerous SUVs are (especially to people walking). Connecting the dots between the causes of crashes should absolutely include vehicle type.

Jerry Foster, Greater Mercer TMA: Capt Otherwise, what policy governs when police collect speed data?

Cpt. Otherwise: The data is captured via the AA-500 PA Police Crash Report. For minor crashes, the speed is unknown. We try to determine speed in our investigations when there is serious injury or death. There are several methods to determine a speed or range of speed (e.g. 50-55mph).

### **Action Items and Conclusion**

Participants brainstormed action items to address traffic safety culture in the region throughout the meeting and posted them to the Chat box. Action items included:

Montgomery County Planning Commission, Andrew Besold: PSA campaign to educate drivers about the rights of pedestrians and cyclists and how drivers need to behave around both.

RSTF Safety Culture Media Toolkit: The DVRPC Office of Safe Streets proposed the creation of a media toolkit for journalists to reference when writing news articles about traffic crashes. This toolkit will take inspiration from Kelcie Ralph's presentation to encourage writers to frame their stories in a thematic fashion, consider their word choices to not unconsciously shift blame, and ensure equal focus on all parties involved in a crash.

Patricia Ott, MBO Engineering, concluded the program with a thank you to all speakers and a reminder to complete the meeting evaluation. The next RSTF meeting is scheduled for September 2020 and the topic is Traffic Safety Culture and the Law.

### **July 1, 2020 RSTF Meeting Attendees List**

Kasim	Ali, PE
Arnold	Anderson
Wendy	Berk
Andrew	Besold
Leonard	Bonarek
Michael	Boyer
Elise	Bremer-Nei
Robyn	Briggs
Corey	Brown
Jesse	Buerk
Laura	Cerutti
Michael	Clemmons
Dana	Dobson
Maureen	Donnelly
Brian	Donovan
Matthew	Edmond
Patrick	Farley
Lauren	Fink
Jerry	Foster
Will	Fraser

Laura	Fredricks
Colin	Fredrickson
Paige	Glassman
Thomas	Hastings
Alison	Hastings
Bill	Houpt
Joy	Huertas
David	Kanthor
Cheryl	Kastrenakes
Emily	Kennedy
Chris	King
Larry	Kubli
Randy	LoBasso
Doris	Lynch
Jennifer	Marandino
Betsy	Mastaglio
Daniel	McArdle
Ellen	Miramontes
Anne	Mitchell
Karin	Morris
Kevin	Murphy
Frank	Neary
Tracy	Nerney
Tracy	Noble
Christine	Norris
Suzanne	O'Hearn
Kristen	Olsen
Ashwin	Patel
Caroline	Picard

Matthew	Popek
Susan	Quick
Moriah	Richardson
Andrew	Ross
John	Saylor
Shelley	Scalzo Brown
Ian	Schwarzenberg
Natalie	Scott
Kristen	Scudder
Wayne	Shelton
Keith	Skilton
Tom	Stanuikynas
Alyson	Strigle
Jana	Tidwell
Christopher	Wagner
Mark	Washington
James	Weist
Evan	Wise
Tara	Woody
Rebecca	Yurkovich
Nick	Zuwiala-Rogers

**RSTF Goal:** *To reduce roadway crashes and eliminate serious injuries and fatalities from crashes in the Delaware Valley*

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# Survey Results

July 1, 2020 RSTF Meeting

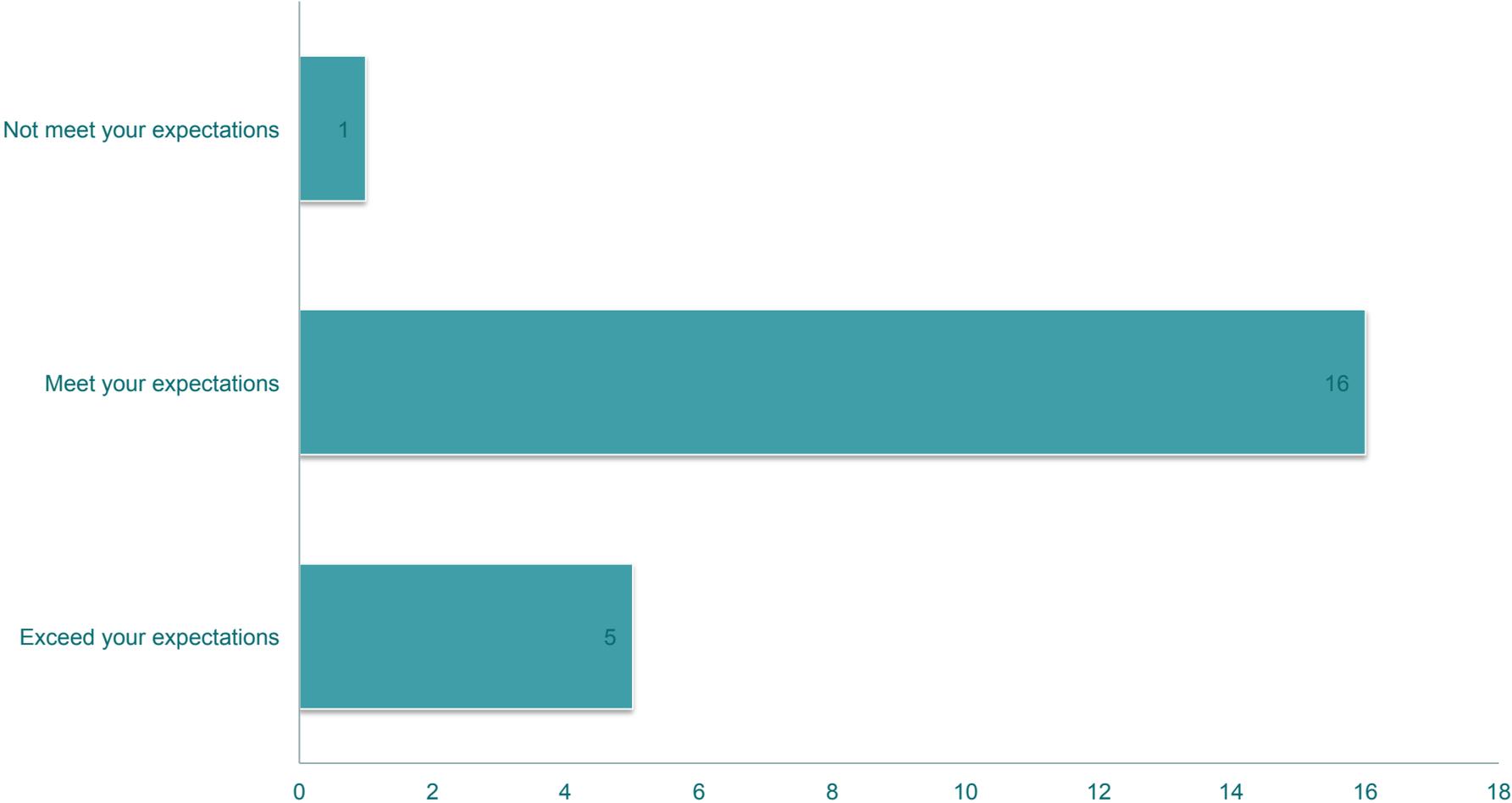


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# Overall Survey Results

- 22 out of 70 meeting attendees responded
- The meeting either met or exceeded the expectations of all respondents but one
- Attendees enjoyed Kelcie Ralph's presentation and the range of viewpoints on the panel.
- 6 respondents volunteered for the working group to compile the media toolkit.

# Question 1: Did this meeting:



## Question 2: What at today's meeting met, exceeded, or didn't meet your expectations?

Excellent speakers!

Dr. Kelcie Ralph's presentation was really excellent. Very interesting research and explained well. The panel discussion was also excellent.

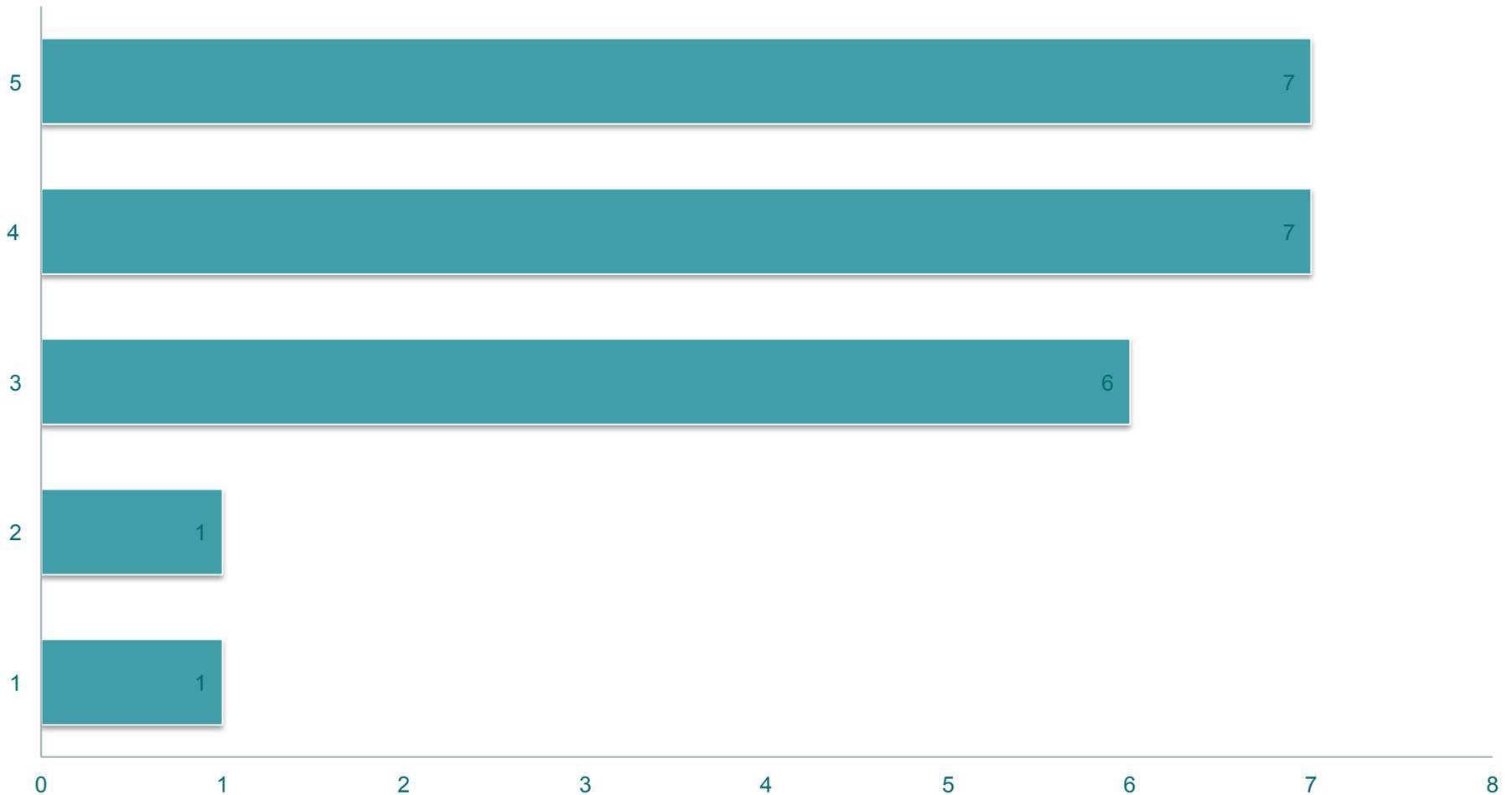
The honesty and openness of the panelists.

This was exactly what I was expecting. My office discusses media language around crashes on a regular basis, so not much new was covered for me, but it was great to see the experts who study this present their findings.

Hearing from Kelsey about her research was very informative. It seems that for reporters, the language and overall information to report a crash is mostly based on the police report so I appreciated hearing from Captain Otherwise about his willingness to learn and provide training.

I was familiar with the work of Pedal Love, and I thought the panel was a helpful supplement and very informative.

### Question 3: How relevant and helpful do you think it was for your job? (Scale of 1-5, 5 being the most relevant and helpful)



\* Respondent who selected 1 also selected "Very Relevant" and "Relevant" for questions regarding which segment was most relevant

## Questions 4-6: Which sessions did you find most relevant?

4. Introduction: 7/22 Responded Very relevant

9/22 Responded Relevant, 1/22 Responded Not relevant, 2/22 Did not attend /Left Blank

5. **Kelcie Ralph Presentation:** 18/22 Responded Very Relevant

2/22 Responded Relevant, 1/22 Responded Not relevant, 1/22 Left Blank

6. Panel Discussion: 15/22 Responded Very Relevant

7/22 responded Relevant

## Question 7: How else can the RSTF raise awareness or take action on this topic?

Continue to promote and advocate for responsible reporting on crashes.

funding research so that journalists have more data to use in their stories and also to promote behavior change

Cosponsor a workshop with members of the press?

Contact reporters when they write biased articles

Send an action item type letter or pamphlet to the press with wording that the transportation community encourages.

Continue the conversation, and invite folks from the media to attend. Traffic alerts are particularly bad at calling crashes "accidents".

I thought the idea of a toolkit for media was a great one.

**Question 9: Following nationwide protests responding to police violence against racial minorities, some traffic safety advocates have argued against the use of strategies that rely on police enforcement in transportation safety planning. How would you like to see the issue addressed by the RSTF? What kind of data might inform a conversation about this? Who would you most like to hear from on this topic?**

I think data on where police are mostly situated as well as which police districts have the most complaints

A future meeting devoted to the topic. Data around effectiveness of enforcement of transportation laws. Panel discussion to educate and inform on this subject

Traffic safety in a community should be determined by the engagement within the community. Change comes from inclusion, not exclusion. Eliminating the police is not the answer.

I personally believe that traffic cops are a deterrent to traffic flow and decrease safety along our roadways. I think having a crash investigative unit is the only time police should be involved. I think there might be some speed data out there showing how police presence slows down speeds but I'm not sure how useful it is.

I thought that stat/statement Kelcie made about automatic enforcement was interesting -- that drivers think it's unnecessary but neighbors/peds think it works. Our country suffers from over-policing... and that's a lot of the systemic racism that people of color face --- automobile stops for broken lights, "looking fishy." So I'm pro having more surveillance and less police in patrol cars.

Use Traffic Police instead. City Council Chairman, Darrell Clarke got this passed last year. They would focus on traffic violations and not crime prevention.

## Question 10: Are there any topics you would like to discuss at future RSTF meetings?

traffic safety culture and social media

New strategies in automatic traffic enforcement.

Addressing high-crash locations where the pedestrians were "crossing illegally."

Street overpass bridges for pedestrians

How to develop a positive public traffic safety culture by disseminating information that people can use.

Senior safety. Incorporating greenery in our roadways to improve community health.

**Question 11: Please provide any additional comments or suggestions that will make RSTF meetings more useful in the future.**

How can we bring LE, MPOs, driver education professionals together to make road systems safer with a more holistic approach.

Really would like to get some more community perspectives - not just professional

Allow people not on the panel, to speak. Have breakout sessions of smaller groups to discuss issues and solutions. Zoom has this capability

# REGIONAL **SAFETY** TASK FORCE



**For more information, please contact:**  
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